

# A Catholic Soldier's Diary

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Parochial Schools as Social Centers

# The Catholic Mind

SEMI-MONTHLY

Price 5 cents: \$1.00 per year

Entered as second-class matter, October 22, 1914, at the Post Office at  
New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

Vol. XV, No. 15. August 8, 1917

THE AMERICA PRESS  
59 East 83d Street  
NEW YORK

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THE AMERICA PRESS, 59 EAST 83D STREET, NEW YORK.

## A Catholic Soldier's Diary

GIOSUÈ BORSI

THE following pages, containing a few extracts from the "Colloquies" of a model Christian soldier, Lieutenant Giosuè Borsi, scarcely need an introduction. No reader will fail to be charmed and edified, not only by their deep spirituality, sincerity and eloquence, but at times even by the sublimity of their language and their thought. These "Colloquies" were written by a young Italian officer in the moments of inspiration which came to him almost amid the crash of shrapnel and the thunder of the guns. They were never corrected or revised, yet Giosuè Borsi everywhere appears master of his thought and style. He writes with vigor, naturalness and ease, with a beauty of form unrivaled perhaps in the annals of modern Italian literature.

Giosuè Borsi was born in Leghorn, June 10, 1888. From his boyhood he gave evidence of extraordinary mental powers. But, as often happens in similar cases, he showed little love for the drudgery of the classroom and the school. For that reason his regular studies were prosecuted in a desultory and listless fashion even up to the time when he took his degree in law at the University of Urbino, in 1913,

But where no bonds of program or curriculum limited his mental powers he poured forth his genius in the most finished and striking literary productions. An intimate friend of his, Ettore Romagnoli, an illustrious

man of letters, has vividly depicted Borsi's many-sided gifts and talents as a speaker, poet, dramatic artist, commentator of Dante, and a novelist. With such gifts he soon became the acclaimed idol of the literary salons and the intellectual centers of Rome and Florence. In spite of the worldly uses to which Borsi then put his talents, the nobler elements were never altogether extinguished in him. In spite of the literary and moral standards to which he then sacrificed a fund of native faith, an innate spirituality always remained. He wrote and lived as a pagan. But ashamed of his own weakness, he would assure his mother that such were not the genuine aspirations of his soul. At times, as if driven by a mysterious power, he would seek refuge in some lonely church and remain in the peaceful gloom, not yet to pray, but as though to absorb the perfume of a better world.

But God's hour was drawing near. Misfortune after misfortune fell upon him and his family. In 1910 his father died suddenly. In 1912 his beloved sister Laura was taken away and left him heart-broken to mourn her loss. In 1913 an innocent five-year-old brother Dino, the light and joy of the widowed home, followed Laura to the grave. After this blow Giosuè's worldly hopes crumbled away, for they were the last ties that bound him to earthly joys. He felt now that he could rely upon those of Heaven alone. He sought and found on his road the priest whom God in His mercy had prepared for him; he knelt at his feet and there poured forth the secrets of his soul in the bitterness of regret and sorrow for his worldly and sinful life. He arose forgiven and purified, and on the anniversary of his sister Laura's death he found in Holy Communion at the

Banquet Table he had long forsaken, happiness and peace.

In order that his return to God might be permanent and firm, not the frail blossom of sentiment, but the mature fruit of intellectual knowledge and persuasion, Borsi devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures, of the Holy Fathers, and the celebrated masters of the Christian life. The "Colloquies" prove to what extent he assimilated the very substance of what he read. During the few months which were left to him he needed to be restrained rather than urged forward in the rapid ascent of his soul towards God. He had formerly loved pleasure and worshiped fame. He now longed for humility, penance and the Cross.

We realize now the motive of his eager and feverish haste. God was calling him, and he answered invoking "Sister Death." War furnished him with the occasion for the long-desired meeting. He enlisted as a volunteer in the army, and hurried to the colors, so radiantly happy, so forgetful of every earthly consideration that all felt that he would never return. Their forebodings were to be realized, for on November 10, 1915, at Zagora, on Monte Cucco, while gallantly leading his platoon to the attack, he fell mortally wounded. His last thoughts were of his mother and eternity. His beloved Dante was not forgotten, and he asked a comrade to give the blood-stained pages of the little volume to his mother with the loving message: "May my sacrifice and her's be acceptable to God."

The renowned spiritual "Colloquies" are a collection of morning prayers and aspirations, the first bearing the date of May 4, 1915, and the last that of June 8 of the same year. They are, therefore, the echo of the aspirations of Borsi's soul for the short period of thirty-

five days. They cover the time that intervened from the day when God inspired him to adopt this method of prayer until the time when as a volunteer he enlisted for the war.

Ettore Romagnoli, who on April 9, 1916, presided in Florence at a meeting gathered to do honor to the art and literary gifts of Giosuè Borsi, thus writes of the "Colloquies": "In these Giosuè Borsi speaks to God in a series of ardent rhapsodies. In them he reveals his soul to God just as it is, gradually divesting it of every shadow, every disguise, every sin. In this labor of enthusiasm and love his soul is purified, enlightened; it becomes plastic under the hand of God and shines like a diamond."

Now let the young soldier speak for himself:

. . . "I believe that Thy Providence, Oh God, has inspired me with the happy thought of prayer and meditation. I shall so write down my thoughts, as I have begun this morning and as I hope, with Thy holy help, to continue the practice until it becomes an indispensable and above all a pleasant habit. Every morning in the fairest and earliest hours of the day, at dawn, while men, slaves of the world, are immersed in slumber, I shall awaken with the first rays of the sun, and greeted by the chirping of the birds, I shall offer to Thee in these pages, my God, the thoughts and aspirations of the day. With Thee, my Adored, must be my first colloquy. I will seek Thy word within my heart. I shall listen with an attentive and devout ear to the inspirations which Thou wilt deign to dictate and suggest to me, and some I shall record in writing, in order that all may not be lost."

"The more I advance in the light of Thy eternal

truth, Oh Lord, the more firmly I am convinced of what I always understood: That for every man, as well as every nation, for all mankind, salvation consists in doing rather than in believing. There is no doubt that faith is 'That dear joy whereon every virtue is built,' but what happens when no virtue blooms? Faith is truly the indispensable seed, but how many times will it be devoured by the birds of the air, how many times it will fall into rocky places and amongst thorns. Faith is the good tree, but what will become of it if it does not bear good fruit?

"Faith avails nothing when we preach it without living up to it, when we listen to it without practising it. It is not only useless, but it will prove our condemnation on the day of the Lord, because nothing can excuse us when we shall have to admit that we knew Him but did not love Him. Jesus! My Saviour! I have found Thee, and I have known Thee, and I see Thy beauty and I feel that in Thee alone is my salvation. Grant, I beseech Thee, that such a great gift shall not be lost, shall not be given to me for my condemnation. Thou seest well how weak and frail I am, so full of every misery and shortcoming. Do not abandon me, because without Thee, Oh Saviour, I am lost. Grant, therefore, that I may love Thee, love Thee evermore, and that I may ever long for Thy yoke.

"I maintain, therefore, that deeds and actions are the only way to salvation, and that by these means the world will find its salvation. Were I to speak to men, if the Lord should deem me worthy of speaking His word, then I should say but one thing that comprises all wisdom: Go back to the Sacraments! and this I should not tire of repeating, of proving, and above all of doing it myself first."

"The doctrine of the Church is not a marble edifice merely to be looked at and admired. It is a living body, of which we are a part and in which we live. It is not a palace at whose porticoes we gaze from the outside. It is the house in which we enter as to our home, to find there our refuge, our food and our rest. It is the house of the Lord."

"Oh Lord, I long to die! But I know not if I am doing well in yearning for it so longingly. Death fascinates me! Life repels me! I feel like a banished child of Eve mourning and weeping in this valley of tears, as I pray every day to the Mother of Mercy. I feel oppressed by the sadness of life, displeased by my wickedness, disheartened by the petty struggles of every day. I would like to have finished, I would like to give up the conflict, I would like to be called at once to judgment. With a true and inward joy I behold death approaching nearer and nearer with majestic and impartial tread. Today I shall have to wait for it a day less than yesterday. But when will it come to me? If it were tomorrow! How would it be! Would it be painful and fraught with agony? Would it be sudden, as quick as the lightning flash, or would it be lingering, slow, sweet and calm? Would the time be allowed me to invoke Thee, Oh God? Thou art silent. It is well that Thou shouldst be so. I understand. It is well for me, for my own salvation; because I am too weak and the certainty of the day and the hour would make me less attentive, less watchful! It would suggest foolish hopes and would betray me perhaps into the hands of the enemy.

"But the terrible silence oppresses me, Oh Lord. I tremble with fear! I fear Thee! I am afraid of my-

self. Or should it come soon, now! Were it to strike this instant as my hand pens this very word! I have centered my thoughts on Thee. I have said to Thee without reserve: Take me! Here I am. Take me now at this instant, now that I love Thee, that I fear Thee, that I am waiting for Thee! Thou seest well that I am not giving even a parting glance at all that I leave behind, that I am detached from everything. I want naught else but Thee, O Lord! For Thy love I will face every trial, no matter how hard. Send me a most painful and ignominious death, a death like Thine own. Didst thou do so, what happiness, what joy would be mine! But I know that I am not worthy of it! Make me die like St. John Chrysostom; like St. Cyprian. But no, their death was a majestic triumph. The former returned from Caucasus, thirty years after his death, and on the Bosphorus, lit by thousands of burning torches and fires, between the shores of two continents, an emperor and his bride went to receive the galley that bore his remains, all draped with silk embroideries, resplendent with lights, like an altar, amidst the tears and the mourning of a countless multitude. The latter, while marching to his doom, could hear behind him a whole people weeping and begging to share his martyrdom. No, O Lord! give me a painful death, an obscure death; let me die suddenly, unnoticed and unknown, but soon. Even now sometimes I rebuke myself for my longing to die! Perhaps under pretence of loving Thee I am masking my weakness and cowardice."

"I wish to die because I see that the wicked wish to live, that they are attached to life as oysters are to rocks; that they are greedy and restless, full of anxieties and fears. They are too ridiculous and contempti-

ble for me to wish to resemble them. They think life should last forever, and they will not listen to any one who tells them that it is transitory and frail. Nay, they are ready to curse the man who thus warns them. They shut their ears and refuse to listen. As for me, life is nothing but a voyage, and a dangerous one. What more natural desire could I have than soon to see its end? Why should I not stand on the prow of my little bark with my face turned to the horizon and my eyes eagerly watching for the coming harbor! The longer the voyage lasts, the greater is the danger of shipwreck and the more numerous are the storms."

"Lord . . . we are so powerless for good, so miserable! We need so much Thy guidance, Thy help, Thy support, that when we do good, as far as it depends on us, we do it always badly, hurriedly, negligently and unwillingly, committing a great many little mistakes. It would be entirely without fruit, nay, vain, useless, ridiculous and dangerous if we were not helped by Thy necessary, indispensable and sovereign grace. Yet Thou art so Divinely good, so benign and generous that Thou deignest to make use of us unprofitable servants, unworthy and unskilled, and make us Thy co-workers, gifted with freedom and capable of merit. This thought alone of Thy infinite goodness should fill us with love and gratitude."

"In the probable event of my going to the front I have thought of arranging and destroying many of my former manuscripts and writings which bear testimony to my infamous life of sin. It took me the whole morning and a great part of the afternoon to burn those unworthy and shameful papers. I have done so, however, without a pang. But I thought with a kind of regret

and fear of the precious time that Thou hast given me to serve and adore Thee, O Lord, but which I have so shamefully wasted. When I remember that Thou wilt ask an account even of one idle word, O my God, what will become of me who have wasted so many that were not only idle, but wicked, poisonous, full of corruption in themselves and bearing corruption and death to others!

"If I put together all that my hand has written and add to that the many letters now hopelessly lost, so many works begun and then given up, and so many useless compositions, I could easily gather matter for a hundred thick volumes. And it would be a library of obscenity and wickedness, a library full of blasphemies, lies, sacrileges, calumnies, frivolity, of frenzied and ridiculous pride. This is what I have done up to the present. And no good done as yet! My God! it is enough to horrify me, and if Thy goodness and patience had not spared me the punishment I deserve, the least I could fear would be to be struck down at once and doomed to suffer unbearable pains for thousands of years before I could have the courage to raise my eyes to Thee. I lied and I was feeding myself on lies. I built my happiness on empty vapor, and it has vanished. Where is it now? All gone, all dead, and I was filling my soul with nothingness! What harm my unbridled licentiousness has wrought! Even the remembrance of it tortures me! I am still suffering days full of melancholy and depression, fits of evil thoughts, nasty suggestions upon filthy objects. All that for having lost and defiled my purity at manhood's dawn.

"Yet, O Lord, how good Thou hast been to me! I acknowledge it and the tears almost fill my eyes as I recall the many proofs of Thy provident, untiring good-

ness. While I was being lost Thou hast kept a watch over me. While I was offending Thee and forgetting Thee, Thou wast planning my salvation. While I was flying from Thee, Thou wert at my side, watchful, attentive, loving, like a father, endeavoring to draw me back from the brink of the precipice. By how many ways Thy Providence has saved me I cannot tell! Merciful Lord, to adore Thee for all eternity will be too short a time to tell Thee my gratitude."

"This morning, while the fire was devouring those papers with a great roaring, as I stirred them and thrust them back so that all should be consumed, I felt the flame smothering me and I thought of the unbearable heat with which some day I shall be cleansed of my sins. Then I shall no longer have the power to sin any more, and I shall sing Thy praises in those flames, foretasting even in those tortures the joy of Thy glory, O Lord. Grant that that day may come soon, because I desire nothing else but in the same way to cancel and expiate all my loathsome sins."

"I firmly believe that the victory of the Italian army will be a great step toward the triumph of justice, toward the coming of Thy holy Kingdom among men. I shall fight with pride, without hatred, without resentment or harshness of heart. Should death come I hope I shall not be surprised without Thy grace. I hope that I may die in holy calm and at peace while in Thy love and invoking Thee. May Mary pray for me in the hour of my death, as I have so often ardently besought her to do! Grant me this grace! Let me die with the name of Thy Holy Mother upon my lips.

"God of Hosts, watch, I beseech Thee, over the Italian army and over the soul of every one of its brave little

soldiers, so gay, so spirited, so intelligent, so resourceful, so frugal. Inspire its leaders, guide them to victory, and grant that they will never abuse Thy protection by harshness or cruelty.

"I pray also with all my heart for our enemies and brothers, whose dear and precious blood perhaps I shall have to shed. Take away from their hearts every sentiment of hatred and rancor. Among so many fighters there are those that love Thee, who are good, intelligent, affectionate in their home-life, to their parents, to their wives, to their little ones! Grant me to remember this always, so that I shall not rush upon them in anger or cruelty.

"Show me the way to exercise on the battlefield toward my enemies as toward my friends some Christian virtue, some act of pity, mercy and love. Grant that I may feel the sentiment of gratitude due the Church for being so provident, so lovingly gentle and kind as to allow me to partake of her Sacraments even on the battlefield, so that I may be ever prepared for Thy call.

"War is a terrible scourge, a fearful chastisement that Thou inflictest on thy people. Although I know too well that often it is the bloody sign by which Thou recallest them to Thee when they have strayed away; although I understand that the evils of war, terrible as they may be, are often amply balanced by the good it brings; although I am persuaded that war is the great test of the endurance of the races, the '*bona occasio*' of the people's inner concord, the inspirer of obedience, of discipline, of sacrifice, of self-forgetfulness, a purifying tempest that scatters a thousand evil vapors, heals thousands of corruptions, cements the love of citizens, inspires a thousand forms of charity; yet I am not so in-

human or sanguinary as to desire it, much less to wish it to be long and cruel. Therefore I believe it my principal duty as a good Christian to wish and pray the war may be brief and that peace may come soon, a lasting peace, a fruitful one, by which man will learn to love Thee always, our Divine Master and Saviour."

"Religious duties, when we truly love God, are the only ones we do not dare to neglect entirely when we think of that terrible eye which ever watches us. They discipline our strength and our courage. To refer all to God, to think always of Him, to see in everything a reflection of His strength and of His wisdom, or of His goodness, to leave everything to His judgment and to His will, makes us sharers in a certain manner in His ineffable and unchangeable unity, makes us less capricious and changeable.

"The practice of religious duties teaches us another thing, a thing which cannot be understood by one who is not faithful to them. Far from wasting our time and energy for work, they increase them, they render them more abundant and fruitful. How this happens we do not fully understand, but few truths are as clear as this. He who does not practise his religious duties sees the time flitting away. He does everything hurriedly and never arrives on time. It seems that everything is against him and he despairs of accomplishing what he undertakes. The love of God infuses a calm tranquillity, a sense of security, a trust, a sense almost of contempt for life, which makes us strong. We do all without hurry and we feel that there is time to do everything. We give up willingly an opportunity that seems good in order not to neglect a religious duty and then the opportunity comes back better even and more propitious than before."

"Here is a thought that occurred to me this morning and which I have deeply pondered. It is incredible, O God, how many ways Thou speakest directly to me and standest always before me, truly as a Friend, Father, Teacher, Brother, Protector and King, so that I seem to have Thee always before me personally, not in shadow and figure, but in reality, always:

- (1) In the direct inspiration of Thy Grace.
- (2) In the person of my confessor, by whose mouth Thou judgest, advisest and forgivest me.
- (3) In The Sacred Scriptures, where I hear Thy voice, that of the Father in the Old Testament, that of the Son in the Gospels, that of the Holy Ghost in the Acts, Epistles and Apocalypse.
- (4) In the person of every Christian who addresses me with affection and love. In the writings of theologians, philosophers and apologists.
- (5) Thou speakest to me in the world, in human society, through the organization of the militant Church, through nature and its laws. In all things I see a reflection of Thy beauty.
- (6) I behold Thee in my mother. In her voice I listen to Thee; in obeying her I obey and adore Thee.
- (7) In the Government, in the King and his ministers, in my immediate superiors, in the editor of my newspaper, in the proprietor and manager who pays my salary. In all art Thou, every one represents Thee.
- (8) Thou art visible in the Holy Father; the Bishop represents Thee like one of Thy Apostles. I see Thee in every priest.
- (9) At Mass I see Thee a sacrificed victim, a sacrificing priest. There Thou art daily sacrificed, Thy blood is daily shed. There Thou art mystically consumed.

(10) Thy adorable person becomes flesh and blood in the Eucharistic species. There I can see and touch Thee and feed upon Thee.

(11) At Benediction Thou art present before my prostrate form, Thou lookest at me, Thou seest me, Thou judgest me.

(12) At any time I wish I can come to Thee before Thy altar and I find Thee truly and really present in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the way in which Thou art before me, speakest to me, commandest me, rulest all my life, so that were I always docile, obedient and humble I would make no mistakes, and I would be happy with Thee and worthy of Thee in heaven."

What will be the fruit of an English translation of the spiritual "Colloquies" of Giosuè Borsi? That question he asked himself when he began writing them. He humbly answered it, saying: "I do not know. Only God can guarantee its fruits. To us it belongs to sow; later on, whether we sleep or wake, the seed grows and develops of itself." But the wonderful success Borsi's little book has had abroad, the many editions of it issued within a single month warrants the hope that his spiritual "Colloquies" will be read by the young of future generations and will accomplish untold good. They will remind all, young and old, what fidelity to the grace of God can accomplish in the soul; they will bring back to the Father's House many a prodigal; and the book will bring home to all its Catholic readers the nobility of their faith and the dignity of a consistent Christian life.

## Parochial Schools as Social Centers

THE REV. EDWARD HAWKS, of Philadelphia

*An Address Delivered at the National Conference  
of Catholic Charities, Washington, D. C.,  
September 17 to 20, 1916*

THE subject under discussion falls under two heads: First, to what extent have we need of social centers in our charity equipment, and second, to what extent might parochial schools and parish halls serve that need.

To the first question the answer might, perhaps, be given that the church building itself has always to some extent been a social as well as a religious center. There never was a time in the history of Christendom when the works of mercy were neglected. In fact it might be said to be characteristic of Christianity that at all times it urges upon men the necessity of a practical demonstration of the fundamental truth of their universal brotherhood. Certain it is that those outside the Church were more impressed at first by her social activities than by her doctrines. The altar and the pulpit were inseparably connected with her mission to heal all the miseries of man. Sooner or later, however, some kind of building was needed to carry on work that could hardly be conducted in the church itself. And so it is that we find hospitals, almshouses, convents and guild-halls springing up as necessary equipments. This is especially true at the present day when the practice of

the Church is to build a school and a parish-hall even before the sacred temple itself. Whatever objections may be urged to this, it is useless to deny that in this way alone does the priest of practical mind meet the necessities of the hour. His experience teaches him that if he is to keep the people faithful to the Church, much more will be demanded of him than the administration of the Sacraments and the preaching of the Gospel. He must go out into the highways and by any legitimate means compel mankind to hear his message. He must above all else find some way of getting to know his own people and to be known by them. Moreover, he must keep pace with the activities of the non-Catholic societies, unless he wishes to convey the impression that he is not interested in anything except what immediately concerns men's souls. If the Church neglects the priceless opportunity that social service offers, then other organizations will step in and take her place. I know that it is urged that the so-called "institutional church" is a failure. The boys' clubs, swimming-pools and sewing classes do not increase the church membership.

I have seen this objection repeatedly urged in non-Catholic journals with a great deal of truth. But I think that this answer can be made. The institutional church is in nearly every case a non-Catholic organization. It does meet with success along those lines in which it can hope to be successful. It does afford opportunities for young people to advance themselves socially. It does keep them off the streets at night. It does teach them economy and refinement. If it does not make practical Christians out of them, that is only because its Christianity is ineffective, because it is not able to supply the needs of the soul, because it cannot give

Divine certitude to the mind. I think there is some truth in the charge that the institutional church confuses the means with the end, and does make people think that the essence of religion lies, not in believing the truth, but in living an outwardly respectable life. But this confusion can only exist where the church has no true faith to propound. Such an objection would not be valid in the case of the Catholic Church engaging in social work. It would always be clear to every one that the Church was only solicitous of improving social conditions in order to be able to save men's souls more easily. I think that what we need is to put into practice in our ordinary parish life, the methods that must be adopted in the foreign mission field, the methods if you will that Our Divine Lord used Himself. He healed the sick, bound up the broken heart, and then provided medicine for the soul. He grasped the occasion that the miseries of social disorder presented.

If there is some doubt as to the value of the institutional church as a means of spreading the Gospel, I think that there can be no doubt that the ideal of what we call the "sacristy priest" has proved to be a failure. Wherever the minister of God has been content to wait for the people to come to him, he has lost his influence with them, no matter how blameless his life has been.

I will dwell no longer on the necessity for social centers in the work of the Church; for I think that the general practice of priests in city parishes, proves that all are fairly agreed that such centers are needed. Social work must be done, and if it is to be done effectually and economically then it must have its workshop. Method and centralization alone, can enable the priest to do much with the small amount of time at his dis-

posal. Then there is the question of lay-helpers, for charity work will always be largely done by them. We read how the Apostles in the infant days of the Church complained that it was impossible for them to leave the pressing duties of their ministry in order to "serve tables." Priests make the same objections today. They realize that "tables must be served" yet they feel that there are higher duties that call for almost all their energy. How can they accomplish without help the things which they know must be done? The answer will be that there are many among the laity that need only direction and inspiration to make them very effective auxiliaries. These should have a place in which to meet. The church and the rectory are only makeshifts. Sooner or later some kind of social hall, guildhall, or parish institute will have to be erected.

This brings me to the second point: the opportunity offered by the existing plant for social work. Practically every parish has a school and with it some kind of hall or basement. The parish of St. Edward's from which I come is situated in a very crowded mill-district. It is composed of a number of fairly wide streets which are flanked by a very large number of narrow lanes each containing about seventy small houses. The priests working in this area were alarmed at the danger of the young people slipping away from the influence of the Church. There were indeed the usual social gatherings, consisting of euchres, concerts and suppers, but they were attended only by a minority of the Catholic population, moreover they were regarded as merely money-making devices, or else as amusements for people who lived rather comfortably and dressed passing well. It was found necessary to discover some means of be-

coming acquainted with the diffident in order to be able to help them. There was, it is true, a large demand made for relief, but it was realized that most of the relief bestowed went not merely to undeserving cases, but to those who were professional beggars. Something was needed which would bring the priest into the closest contact with those who needed his ministry the most. Meanwhile the non-Catholics were active. A well-equipped children's hospital was almost entirely engaged in treating Catholic children. In the neighborhood there was also a palatial settlement-house and day-nursery, a large Y. M. C. A. building, and a number of dispensaries, etc., besides Boy Scout organizations, swimming-pools, etc. Indeed, nearly every English-speaking non-Catholic church had some attractions to offer to the young people whose only playground at night was the street. Under these conditions it was felt that the new school that was to be erected should be especially planned to meet not only educational but social necessities; so its principal feature was a very large auditorium and there were also a number of committee rooms, smaller halls, and a large airy basement.

The method employed in reaching the people started with the school itself. One of the principal dangers which threatened the success of the Catholic school was the large number of absentees. A great many of those who remained away from school were children of families that were out of hand. But using harsh measures would drive the children from the school, and altogether to tolerate their absence would be destructive of discipline. Moreover it was just the families who would offer the readiest opportunity for social work. It was out of the question for the priests to become truant offi-

cers. They did not have the time in the first place, and besides it was thought that this kind of work would train a most efficient band of lay-helpers. The Conference of St. Vincent de Paul was therefore chosen to deal with the absentee question. The parish was divided into eight sections, two men being appointed to each. To them the Sisters reported each day the names of the absentees and the same evening a man called upon the family and tactfully inquired into the cause of the child's absence. Sometimes it was sickness, sometimes truancy, frequently lack of clothes and shoes, and again mere indifference. But in each case something was learnt of the needs of the family without seeming to interfere unduly with its privacy. A splendid opportunity for social service was thus grasped and very soon a list of families was prepared by which the priest knew of conditions that his official annual visit would not be likely to disclose. The truants were warned and at length turned over to the public school authorities. Shoes and clothing were provided for the needy, and a spiritual visit from a priest met the case of indifference. It was found that a frequent cause of inefficiency in school-work was due to the lack of a proper midday meal. In a mill-district a surprisingly large number of married women are forced to go out and work if large families are to be maintained. Then there is the case of the widow, too.

A new experiment was now tried that met with unlooked for success. In the large room in the basement a kitchen was fitted up and a plain and wholesome midday-meal was served free of charge to all those children whose parents were working. A great change was soon observed in the boys and girls. Before it was found that many of them went home to a dry crust of

bread and a glass of water, and some of them had nothing whatever to eat until evening. In place of this, warm meat, soup and wholesome vegetables enable the child to attend to studies at the afternoon sessions. To pay for this meal an annual entertainment easily defrayed the surprisingly small expense. About seventy or eighty children were thus fed each day and the midday-meal gave the Sisters an additional opportunity to train the children in orderly habits and to get to know them outside the actual schoolroom.

But though the school was thus increased in efficiency we still had to deplore the fact that the parents of several hundred children could not be persuaded to send them to our school. This happened mostly in cases of mixed marriages. These public-school children had hitherto been gathered on Sunday afternoon for catechetical instruction and for the rest of the week they were unknown to the church. Their constrained demeanor in the presence of the clergy, showed that they never felt quite at ease in the practice of their religion. Moreover they were in danger of becoming a separate type from the children of the Catholic school for they frequently spoke of themselves as "going to the Protestant school" and seemed to think that quite a different standard was demanded of them. It was natural that they should consider themselves thus and yet it was hard to change the situation for it was impossible to treat all the children exactly alike. The means taken to meet the difficulty was a class held in the middle of the week by one of the priests, all the atmosphere of the Sunday-school being deliberately removed from the class. Attendance was voluntary and to the child's mind it was almost the same as going to the "movies", for we

had moving-pictures too. . . . Thus a love for the priest was fostered in the children; and many of them loudly demanded that their parents should send them to the Catholic school. Moreover, Protestant children came in large numbers and this helped to eliminate their prejudice against the Church. The only religious features were pictures from the Bible and lives of the Saints, and the recitation of certain prayers and a very simple catechizing at odd moments on fundamental Catholic beliefs.

The description of these activities leads up to the question of how to deal with the boys and girls who have left school. In this matter the opportunities that the parish-hall and school building offer are enormous. Who can go through our streets at night and see the crowds of young people at the street corner, without wishing to do something for them? There stands the school with its doors closed and shades drawn. Could it not be utilized in some way? At any rate an attempt was made. The big basement was first fitted up as a pool-room and gymnasium, then an officer of the United States army generously trained the boys in military movements. Of course this is more or less disappointing work for it is hard to keep boys faithful and it is difficult to preserve absolute decorum in a playroom unless you drive off the very boys who need the place most. This work is about as successful as most work of the kind; and as to its necessity, surely there can be no need of argument. If the boys are not in the church playroom, they will be in that of some other denomination, or worse still in the low dance-hall or pool-parlor.

The girls in a mill-district are also exposed to great danger. Their occupation gives them the opportunity

of forming undesirable acquaintances, which prove the ruin of numbers of our girls. Their early and disastrous marriages and their lack of thrift demand that something should be done for them. It was necessary to approach the subject carefully for it will never do to herd large numbers of girls together as you can boys. So it was arranged that a number of women of the parish should take districts. I want you particularly to notice the importance attached to the fact that these women belonged to the parish, or at least to the immediate neighborhood, for to have imported workers from a fashionable suburb would have been useless in this case. Waiving altogether the question as to what good can be done by so-called "slumming," it must be admitted that only those who knew all about the lives and mode of living of these young girls could be able to give them real help. The women that I speak of were usually fore-women in the very mills where the girls worked, and they were chosen on account of their solid piety and good sense.

It was their duty to call upon the younger women who were in danger of forming undesirable acquaintances and to invite them to spend a pleasant evening at the church-hall. Everything was done to avoid the appearance of undue influence or officiousness. The girls were to be treated as friends. Each week those who responded to the invitation met in a room in the hall. Here they sang, played or danced as they wished, but most of them preferred to take up millinery work and dress-making. A number of first-class milliners and dress-makers volunteered their services and the girls became interested in trimming their own hats and cutting their own garments. The beginnings were small, but un-

questionably they will grow, as the girls and their friends get better acquainted. Most of the help in this work was provided by a very efficient Dorcas society such as I suppose every parish feels bound to have. The visiting of the girls in their homes, the superintending of the meals for children, the constant meeting of the society to discuss plans, has given this Dorcas society an intimate knowledge of conditions that has taken away the appearance of officialism, and trained a large body of devoted auxiliaries to the clergy.

From the work amongst the younger people, the need was realized for bringing the married women together. A large percentage of our social evils arise from disordered family life. Many mothers are well disposed but ignorant. Many of them even need to be taught the very elementary principles of economy and good house-keeping. Many again though careful about their children, neglect themselves, and in this way become unattractive and incapable of maintaining cheerful homes. It might seem that the teaching of economics was far removed from church work. Yet economics is a most necessary science in these days of expensive and luxurious living, and if there is no other means of teaching it, then the Church must do it. The outgrowth of these thoughts resulted in St. Monica's Gild, which was primarily started to ensure that married women would have a separate Communion day once a month, and a monthly service in church when they should pray that God would grant them happy homes. This organizing of married women was a most fortunate move, for by this means desirable friendships were formed and successful mothers were able to help the unexperienced.

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